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VIP

Hollywood Discovers The Weapons Wizard

By Maxine Cheshire

His silenced Ingham Model 11 sub-machine gun has already been the super star macho movie prop, such as when Robert Redford was imperiled in "Three Days of the Condor" and Charles Bronson was leading the televised "Raid On Entebbe" and John Wayne was shooting it out with mobsters in "McQueen."

Finally, someone in Hollywood has realized that Mitchell WerBell III, one of the inventors of that deadly little repeating handgun that replaced the cowboys' six-shooter in adventure thrillers, is himself a movie script.

WerBell—arms merchant extraordinaire . . . legendary wizard of whispering death . . . soldier of fortune . . . OSS officer . . . militant anti-communist . . . counter-revolutionary . . . eccentric promotional genius—is going to see himself on wide-screen, larger than life, before he dies.

Jim Hougan, one of the writers who helped immortalize WerBell in his book, "Spooks," has been asked to write the movie treatment. He will begin in April by joining classes at the counter-terrorist school WerBell runs in Powder Springs, Ga., where an apt student can learn to kill with an ordinary ballpoint pen or a more lethal and exotic fake cigar that fires a single bullet.

According to Hougan, Clint Eastwood is the actor with whom the producers are negotiating.

The diminutive, mustachioed WerBell is the Mike Todd of paramilitary operatives. He affects berets, kilts, elephant-skin gun cases, guard dogs, silver-topped sword canes and an antique sterling bottle caddy which he carries everywhere with him full of his private stock: single malt Scotch from the Isle of Islay.

News stories over the past decade have glorified WerBell's exploits in Haiti during the abortive invasion attempt in 1968 and during the 1965 American intervention to put down a revolution in the Dominican Republic. Since Vietnam, his dealings have been global.

But it took television and ABC's "20/20" last year to make WerBell a star. People who had never heard of him before have become aware of a real-life swashbuckler whose exploits make the characters played by Redford and Bronson and even "Duke" Wayne sound like sissies.

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